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The Pathfinder

—
SEPTEMBER, 1911
—

Poems by
Anna Hempstead Branch



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THE PATHFINDER

GLEN LEVIN SWIGGETT, *Editor*
THOMAS S. JONES, JR., *Asso. Ed'r.*

Contributions are invited from all lovers of good books and high ideals in literature, art and life. The editors disclaim responsibility for the opinions of contributors.

CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER

SWEET WEARINESS *By Anna Hempstead Branch*

AN AMERICAN POET

By William Stanley Braithwaite

POEMS BY ANNA HEMPSTEAD BRANCH

SAPPHICS

By Thomas S. Jones, Jr.

FULFILLMENT

By Louis V. Ledoux

SPRING IN THE SOUTHLAND

By John Vance Cheney

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VOLUME FIVE

The current volume of *The PATHFINDER* contains the following as main features:

January	Poems of Lizette Woodworth Reese.
February	Poems of Lionel Johnson.
March	When <i>The Tatler</i> Told Its Tale, by Warwick James Price.
April	<i>William Sharp</i> (Fiona MacLeod), by William Stanley Braithwaite.
May	The Poetry of Louise Imogen Guiney.
June	The Poetry of Florence Earle Coates.
July	<i>My Thackeray</i> , by Julian Park.
August	Little Poems from Japanese Anthologies, by Evaleen Stein.
September	Poems by Anna Hempstead Branch.



The October number will contain, in part, *The Seamaid's Music* (a one-act drama), by Dorothea Laurence Mann, and *Rubens*, by George B. Rose.

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SWEET WEARINESS

By ANNA HEMPSTEAD BRANCH

Fatigue itself may be a pleasant thing
And weariness be silken, soft and fine !
Upon my eyes its little vapors shine,
Trailing me softly like a colored wing !
Tender as when lovèd voices sing
It steals upon me and with touch divine
Lulls all my senses till each thought of mine
Is hushed to quiet, unremembering.

Oh, weariness thrice dear, so frailly spun
Of ended pleasure that still shines and glows ;
Oh, weariness, thrice dear ! What have I done
To earn this delicate and sweet repose ?
Child, thou hast worshiped at the setting sun
And looked long, long, upon the opening rose.

*AN AMERICAN POET**

By WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAITE

It was believed of Miss Branch's *The Shoes That Danced*, which was published in 1905, that her next volume would place her in the front rank of contemporary poets. Her latest volume now does something more than this; it indicates a poet who defies, by the very quality and variety of her work, any attempt to be complacently regarded as minor, and who by these characteristics touches the standard of greatness established by the high traditions of the English masters. We do not expect the fact to be acknowledged with trumpets of praise and obligation, as in older days when public feeling and sentiment were more responsive to the spiritual suggestions and revelation of poetry. But the fact remains, and the discerning critics who do not betray their ideals of the high function that is theirs to interpret and promulgate the message of great art, should help to a wider appreciation and acceptance of this significant realization. Here is the opportunity. Will they take the advantage it gives to impress

*Reprint from *Boston Transcript*.

their belief that the very highest poetry is a possible achievement to-day, and that the time is capable of producing a great poet? Miss Branch has earned the right of critical support and faith. It will not seem so hard if the public withholds or delays its approbation; it is always so much slower than those whose intuition like a magnet attracts the essence of spiritual vision made palpable through perfected forms of poetic speech, and in themselves grow exalted in the creative energy of interpretation.

The most dangerous prophecy in the world is poetic prophecy; those of some of the most eminent and discerning critics in the history of English literature have belied their acumen and insight, made fallacious the value of their taste, and arrived at nothing more in the end but a flat contradiction. We claim no distinction for the high office of prophecy; our declaration in regard to Miss Branch's genius is a mere volitional statement of what is positively achieved. The standard of that achievement is an inevitable historical fact; that is Miss Branch's test, and through that our application of her results to the traditional touchstone of her art. One may not like her subjects, though we cannot conceive of any perceptive intelligence not

liking them; her method may not wholly convince and communicate the substance that she shapes, though we cannot conceive of any receptive and sensitive spirit, responsive to the invocation of truth and beauty and all their correlative ideals, who will not immediately be captivated by the spell of her symbols and embodiments; her philosophy may tend to a superfine and elemental psychology, but its spiritual drift can never fail to illuminate the aspiration in the individual soul fed by the oil of vision; not by the material wherewith the structure is reared, but by the architecture whereby it becomes the concrete realization. The palpable symbol of spirit, the inner reality becoming an outward development of man's progress in his growth towards naturalistic perfection. In every characteristic of those essentials which combine to build an art so inexplicable of spirit, so subtle and intangible in the compound of verbal essences, Miss Branch proves herself a great poet.

A spiritual ecstasy in the human soul groping upwards toward the gleam through the manifold experiences of the world, shod with imagination and winged with vision, seems the contagious and compelling influence of Miss

Branch's work. It is the pure renascence of the romantic spirit, to whom the world is full of wonder and strangeness, but whose brightness and beauty is dimmed for man because of his passions and moralities, his misdirected purposes, his too heavy sense of an hylic consciousness; and like all great poets Miss Branch's art shapes and illuminates the ideals of his spirit; she symbolizes his doctrines, transforms his philosophies from the data of empiricism to a vital embodiment of aspiring dreams.

This volume of poetry reaches a crisis in the development of modern verse, in that it prophesies the human ideal in the new age. The progress of humanity has been in cycles, manifesting itself now in material, now in spiritual aspirations. The arts have reflected the tendency, and poetry, above all the arts, has been the precursory vision through which mankind beheld the future. And great periods of poetry have arisen out of the unfertile soil of materiality; led humanity back to spirit, from the shadow to the substance of life, from the temporal to the eternal values of existence. It has been a long preparation in America, thirty years of noble effort in our poets breaking through the tangled and obstructed trail of our material existence;

but now comes a poet who blazes the path to the end, and bursts, flame-like, into the open and infinite regions of the soul's best ideals. By what qualities does Miss Branch achieve this distinction? What embodiments does she shape into articulate symbols? Does she voice her own experience in subjective utterance, or by an intuitive imagination manifest the psychology of human experience, detaching so far the individual soul from the symbolized passion that it becomes the objective, spiritualized representation of some human ideal? The sum of human energy is toward a perfected existence in the world. The actual struggle for its attainment is in the visible battleground of the senses, the earth upon which we labor, and play with its tragic and comic enactments; but the impelling cause and the secret effect of these mysteries upon which the hope of perfection must depend are the invisible manifestations of our manifold nature, the hidden and real significance of our consciousness with which our sensible experiences are perpetually at war. The whole tangled scheme of life is too complicated a web of emotions in which the flesh responds to all physical influences and allurement against the higher promptings of the spirit.

The mission of all great poets has been to emphasize the promptings of the spirit in the attainment of some ideal aspiration, and through it to realize the approach to truth and materialize the image of beauty. In fulfilling the mission of a great poet in this volume Miss Branch has combined the quality of substance with the forms of great art. *Rose of the Wind*, the little dramatic piece of elemental conjuration and redemptive power of the Cross, which opens the book; the long blank-verse narrative *Nimrod*, Miss Branch's masterpiece and most glorious accomplishment in modern English poetry; *Selene*, with its haunting, unappeasable aspiration of the soul; *The Wedding Feast*, a narrative of pure spiritual magic which Coleridge's great poem alone matches, and the two shorter pieces, *The Monk in the Kitchen*, and *To an Enemy*—these with some five or six short poems represent a body of work which for sustained imagery, spiritual exaltation, deep and penetrative thought, imaginative psychology, color and picturesqueness of phrase, and subtlety of music places its author in romantic succession to Keats and Shelley.

We think Miss Branch's highest achievement is *Nimrod*, though we feel that the haunt-

ing magic and subtle mystery of *The Wedding Feast*, may incline the opinion of many to give that poem preëminence. The volume being too infinite with riches, we will confine ourselves to an account of this poem to indicate the power of the poet's vision and the incomparable perfection of her art. It is a poem composed of over two thousand lines written in blank verse. The subject is the vanity of Nimrod, that "strong huntsman of the Lord," who with a divine arrogance looks upon "great Babel," his city, and demands that God shall send unto him an angel communicating the wisdom of His Word that his spirit may grow wise, and he and all his sons rule as kings. But instead of the revelation of his wisdom, God sent a "pale and spectral host of war horse and of rider," over which Nimrod gains an imagined victory, and begins the building of the great towers that will reach the "countenance of the sun," rising from the "great and mighty town," beneath them, and from which he will storm the sky:—

I will lift
My fortress straight against God's citadels.
And having with my frontage besieged the pale
Frontiers of heavenly air, then will I lift
My slow invasion to the immortal plains

And there, defying all His hosts, will drive
His bright-fleeced whirlwinds; hurricanes with eyes;
His golden-bellied lightnings; shaggy thunders;
His meteors that dart like screaming birds
Among tumultuous forests of black night. . . .

. . . On His own cohorts will I turn,
And many a starry breast shall bleed that night
And many a snow-white sweet immortal shape
That cannot even die shall writhe and bend,
Blown up and down as windy fires would burn.
And there shall be great tramplings, whinneyings
Of wingèd steeds astonished. Archangels pale
Shall rend their blazing splendors off and wrapped
In panic only, seek escape in night,
To hide them in the vastness. . . .

. . . . To heave
My flaming battle-axe at God's own breast!
Then will I plunge into His secret place
And snatch from out His page that Hieroglyph.

And so Nimrod builds his mightier city, writing
upon its cornerstone "Behold the man that
snatched God's Word from Heaven, Great Nim-
rod!" raising on high,—

Sheer peaks of bronze and armaments of domes
That bright with sullen splendor spread their shields
Against God's anger. But the eternal sky
Preserved its shape in silence and the sun
With all its hosts of light sped on its way,
Bright, unappeasable. And God came down,
Invisible, in radiance panoplied.
And spoke with Nimrod. But Nimrod, in his heart,
Being greatly wroth, hated Him for His speech.

Then came God's slow but sure punishment of Nimrod, the dispersal of his people with various tongues over the earth, the destruction of Babel, and the feeble and agonized ruler amidst the ruins of his pride. This wonderful poem moves on to the end with the sublime harmonies of *Paradise Lost*, beaten as it were out of the very gold and silver of sound. Take this passage, when in his desolation and defeat the "Babel's curse fell on great Nimrod's tongue:—"

Then, then, his spirit's golden bastions shook!
His starry dome of high philosophy
Flung down its meteors, and the columns huge
Of stately logic crumbled. In his soul
The shining architectures of sweet tone
Were spread in ruin. Down the corridors
Of his dark brain plunged wild and gusty shapes
Of syllables affrighted. Routed forth,
Flared great white faces of astonished words.

. . . . Verbs like men at arms
Charged battling forth; and bold and blazing nouns
Like chariots, fury ridden; adjectives
That spread their fiery bellies in the sun
Till all their quivering wings as copper shone;
Ejaculations huge, deep tones of woe,
Thundering gutturals, hissing sibilants
Of fire-breathing serpents — every sound
That once had ministered to dream or thought,
Plunged from his shouting lips and shook the air,
Blazed brightly on the shadowy gale and then
Swept up to heaven.

Scattered throughout the poem are marvellous passages carved out of the rough block of truth, that startle one with the force of an oracular declaration; such a one we may cite as this: "Man never created a new virtue." But the whole spiritual drift of the narrative, if one may call it that, is significant in symbolizing the futility and weakness of the flesh, the powers and glories of mere physical existence against that mystical growth of the soul through which wisdom and reverence take him into the eternal kingdom of his heritage. The conception is broad and the utterance large, and so compact and glittering with an intense imagination that the imagery sweeps through an atmosphere full of rushing wonders. It is a great poem in a book full of wonderful poetry.

POEMS BY
ANNA HEMPSTEAD BRANCH*

THE MONK IN THE KITCHEN

I

Order is a lovely thing;
On disarray it lays its wing,
Teaching simplicity to sing.
It has a meek and lowly grace,
Quiet as a nun's face.
Lo—I will have thee in this place!
Tranquil weil of deep delight,
Transparent as the water, bright—
All things that shine through thee appear
As stones through water, sweetly clear.
Thou clarity,
That with angelic charity
Revealest beauty where thou art,
Spread thyself like a clean pool.
Then all the things that in thee are
Shall seem more spiritual and fair,
Reflectons from serener air—
Sunken shapes of many a star
In the high heavens set afar.

II

Ye stolid, homely, visible things,
Above you all brood glorious wings
Of your deep entities, set high,

* Reprinted from *Ross of the Wind*, and *The Shoes That Danced*, with kind permission of the publishers, Houghton Mifflin Company.

Like slow moons in a hidden sky.
But you, their likenesses, are spent
Upon another element.
Truly ye are but seemings —
The shadowy cast-off gleamings
Of bright solidities. Ye seem
Soft as water, vague as dream ;
Image, cast in a shifting stream.

III

What are ye ?
I know not.
Brazen pan and iron pot,
Yellow brick and gray flag-stone
That my feet have trod upon —
Ye seem to me
Vessels of bright mystery.
For ye do bear a shape, and so
Though ye were made by man, I know
An inner Spirit also made
And ye his breathings have obeyed.

IV

Shape, the strong and awful Spirit,
Laid his ancient hand on you.
He waste chaos doth inherit ;
He can alter and subdue.
Verily, he doth lift up
Matter, like a sacred cup.
Into deep substance he reached, and lo
Where ye were not, ye were ; and so
Out of useless nothing, ye
Groaned and laughed and came to be.
And I use you, as I can,
Wonderful uses, made for man,
Iron pot and brazen pan.

V

What are ye?
I know not;
Nor what I really do
When I move and govern you.
There is no small work unto God.
He requires of us greatness;
Of his least creature
A high angelic nature,
Stature superb and bright completeness.
He sets to us no humble duty.
Each act that he would have us do
Is haloed round with strangest beauty.
Terrific deeds and cosmic tasks
Of his plainest child he asks.
When I polish the brazen pan
I hear a creature laugh afar
In the gardens of a star,
And from his burning presence run
Flaming wheels of many a sun.
Whoever makes a thing more bright,
He is an angel of all light.
When I cleanse this earthen floor
My spirit leaps to see
Bright garments trailing over it.
Wonderful lustres cover it,
A cleanliness made by me.
Purger of all men's thoughts and ways,
With labor do I sound Thy praise,
My work is done for Thee.
Whoever makes a thing more bright,
He is an angel of all light.
Therefore let me spread abroad
The beautiful cleanliness of my God.

VI

One time in the cool of dawn
Angels came and worked with me.
The air was soft with many a wing.
They laughed amid my solitude
And cast bright looks on everything.
Sweetly of me did they ask
That they might do my common task.
And all were beautiful — but one
With garments whiter than the sun
Had such a face
Of deep remembered grace,
That when I saw I cried — “Thou art
The great Blood-Brother of my heart.
Where have I seen thee?” — And he said,
“When we are dancing 'round God's throne,
How often thou art there.
Beauties from thy hands have flown
Like white doves wheeling in mid air.
Nay — thy soul remembers not?
Work on, and cleanse thy iron pot.”

VII

What are we? I know not.

DREAM

But now the Dream has come again, the world is as of old.
Once more I feel about my breast the heartening splendors fold.
Now I am back in that good place from which my footsteps came,
And I am hushed of any grief and have laid by my shame.

I know not by what road I came—oh wonderful and fair.

Only I know I ailed for thee and that thou wert not there.

Then suddenly Time's stalwart wall before thee did divide,

Its solid bastions dreamed and swayed and there was I inside.

It is thy nearness makes thee seem so wonderful and far.
In that deep sky thou art obscured as in the noon, a star.
But when the darkness of my grief swings up the mid-day sky

My need begets a shining world. Lo, in thy light am I.

All that I used to be is there and all I yet shall be.

My laughter deepens in the air, my quiet in the tree.

My utter tremblings of delight are manna from the sky,
And shining flower-like in the grass my innocencies lie.

And here I run and sleep and laugh and have no name at all.

Only if God should speak to me then I would heed the call.

And I forget the curious ways, the alien looks of men,
For even as it was of old, so is it now again.

Still every angel looks the same and all the folks are there

That are so bounteous and mild and have not any care.
But kindest to me is the one I would most choose to be.
She is so beautiful and sheds such loving looks on me.

She is so beautiful—and lays her cheek against my own.
Back—in the world—they all will say, “How happy you have grown.”

Her breath is sweet about my eyes and she has healed
me now,
Though I be scarred with grief, I keep her kiss upon
my brow.

All day, sweet land, I fight for thee outside the goodly
wall,
And 'twixt my breathless wounds I have no sight of thee
at all!
And sometimes I forget thy looks and what thy ways
may be!
I have denied thou wert at all — yet still I fight for thee.

*TO A NEW YORK SHOP-GIRL DRESSED
FOR SUNDAY*

To-day I saw the shop-girl go
Down gay Broadway to meet her beau.

Conspicuous, splendid, conscious, sweet,
She spread abroad and took the street.

And all that niceness would forbid,
Superb, she smiled upon and did.

Let other girls, whose happier days
Preserve the perfume of their ways,

Go modestly. The passing hour
Adds splendor to their opening flower.

But from this child too swift a doom
Must steal her prettiness and bloom,

Toil and weariness hide the grace
That pleads a moment from her face.

So blame her not if for a day
She flaunts her glories while she may.

She half perceives, half understands,
Snatching her gifts with both her hands.

The little strut beneath the skirt
That lags neglected in the dirt,

The indolent swagger down the street —
Who can condemn such happy feet!

Innocent! vulgar — that's the truth!
But with the darling wiles of youth!

The bright, self-conscious eyes that stare
With such hauteur, beneath such hair!
Perhaps the men will find me fair!

Charming and charmed, flippant, arrayed,
Fluttered and foolish, proud, displayed,
Infinite pathos of parade!

The bangles and the narrowed waist —
The tinsel'd boa — forgive the taste!
Oh, the starved nights she gave for that,
And bartered bread to buy her hat!

She flows before the reproachful sage
And begs her woman's heritage.

Dear child, with the defiant eyes,
Insolent with the half surmise
We do not quite admire, I know
How foresight frowns on this vain show!

And judgment, wearily sad, may see
No grace in such frivolity.

Yet which of us was ever bold
To worship Beauty, hungry and cold!

Scorn famine down, proudly expressed
Apostle to what things are best.

Let him who starves to buy the food
For his soul's comfort find her good,

Nor chide the frills and furbelows
That are the prettiest things she knows.

Poet and prophet in God's eyes
Make no more perfect sacrifice.

Who knows before what inner shrine
She eats with them the bread and wine?

Poor waif! One of the sacred few
That madly sought the best they knew!

Dear — let me lean my cheek to-night
Close, close to yours, Ah, that is right.

How warm and near! At last I see
One beauty shines for thee and me.

So let us love and understand —
Whose hearts are hidden in God's hand.

And we will cherish your brief Spring
And all its fragile flowering.

God loves all prettiness, and on this
Surely his angels lay their kiss.

SERVICE

If I could only serve him,
How sweet this life would be.
Last night I dreamed my darling,
Alive, returned to me.

I brought him from the cupboard
 The things he liked to eat,—
 The little piece of honey,
 The rye bread and the meat.

I sang the song he asked for
 The night he went away.
 How was it, when I loved him,
 I could have said him nay!

I took the time to please him,
 With a hand upon his brow,
 Amid the awful leisure
 There was no hurry now.

How strange I once denied him
 What took so little while.
 A kiss would seem so simple,
 So slight a thing a smile.

With pleased sweet looks of wonder
 He took what I could give,—
 Such words as we deny them
 Only because they live.

The pale light of the morning
 Shone in upon the wall.
 Come back to me, my darling,
 And I will give you all.

HER WORDS

[From *Songs For My Mother.*]

My mother has the prettiest tricks
 Of words and words and words.
 Her talk comes out as smooth and sleek
 As breasts of singing birds.

She shapes her speech all silver fine
Because she loves it so.
And her own eyes begin to shine
To hear her stories grow.

And if she goes to make a call
Or out to take a walk,
We leave our work when she returns
And run to hear her talk.

We had not dreamed these things were so
Of sorrow and of mirth.
Her speech is as a thousand eyes
Through which we see the earth.

God wove a web of loveliness,
Of clouds and stars and birds,
But made not anything at all
So beautiful as words.

They shine around our simple earth
With golden shadowings,
And every common thing they touch
Is exquisite with wings.

There's nothing poor and nothing small
But is made fair with them.
They are the hands of living faith
That touch the garment's hem.

They are as fair as bloom or air,
They shine like any star,
And I am rich who learned from her
How beautiful they are.

*SAPPHICS**By THOMAS S. JONES, JR.*

*Sing the song of youth in its golden season,
Youth, glad youth, more dear than the ages' treasure !
Still as then across the far fields of twilight
Your voice is singing*

*Hushed with wonder e'en as the low sky's flaming,
Hushed in longing, fraught as the winds of twilight :
Youth, dear youth, so ever your sweet voice singing,
One with the wind's song.*

*What are years that go as a moment's fleeting,
Years forgot and lost in the dust of silence ;
Still as then across the far fields of Lesbos
Your voice at even !*

AT THE WINDS' CALL

There are winds that surge as the wash of waters,
Strong and full and deep as a storm at flood-time,
Winds that call until in my soul's far reaches
Wakens an answer :

Wild as winds or ever the waste sea's longing,
Wild and lonely, stirred from the depths of hunger ;
Lonely winds, more vast are the empty spaces
Deep in my being.

When, at last, shall come the long-wearied silence —
Peace, gray peace, or merely the end of dreaming ;
Yet the winds have called, and my heart's old longing
Cries through the darkness !

ELEGY

Here shall rest unmoved through the waning seasons
One who knew and dreamed, and forgot in dreaming;
Now alone the trees, who remembered always,
Are his companions.

They to whom he came for their silent healing,
They who ever gave of their ancient patience;
Now alone with them and the night-wind's crooning
Leave him forgotten.

TO A HILL-TOWN

This to you across the swift years that gather,
This to give for ways that were filled with gladness,
Ways hill-girt and under the Spring's first sunrise —
Paths that were golden.

Here they lie in memory's early keeping,
Wind-swept hills dim-misted with purple vapor —
One lone hill and three lonely pine-trees tossing
Black on the sky-line.

For these most — yet dusk on the lake's still edges,
Dusk and moonlight sweeping a wash of silver,
Chime of bells and softly an organ's throbbing. . . .
Music and moonlight.

And for them, long gone from the hills of morning,
Song and laughter, voices that faintly echo. . . .
All to you, who made as a dream of beauty
Youth's little Springtime!

ONLY

Spring will come and go in a maze of wonder,
 Skies unfurled again to the lilac weather,
 Burdened branches and always a light wind blowing
 Just as it used to.

Only you, the secret to me of Springtime,
 All its sweetness, all of its poignant beauty—
 Only you may never come back, and only
 I shall remember.

*FULFILLMENT**

By Louis V. LEDOUX

Happy! Yea happy forever and aye!
 Scarlet bursts through the eastern grey
 And the night is past;
 For a woman's lips and a woman's hair,
 And the soul of her womanhood, wonderful, fair,
 Are mine at last.

Dawn was near but no whisper told
 Why the stars went out and the world grew cold
 As the void above;
 When suddenly out of the darkness sprang
 My passionate rose and the whole world sang
 Of love, of love.

Now happy, yea happy forever I stand
 The rose of passion within my hand;
 And the day may close
 With the dust of worlds on the midnight strown
 For I hold forever, forever my own
 The passionate rose.

*SPRING IN THE SOUTHLAND**By JOHN VANCE CHENEY*

Thought-soft they are gone, the grays of the rain,
The browns go under the green again;
The wind sings love-songs whither he blows,
Now to the poppy, and now to the rose;
And which is the sweeter nobody knows.

Thought-soft they are gone, the browns and the grays,
From the hill paths all and the valley ways;
Where they were is some lovely thing,
The meadow-lark and the linnet sing.

Lupin, larkspur and painted-brush,
Into the arms of day they rush;
Musk and iris and columbine,
From the slope to the shore where the sea waves shine;

Scarlet and gold and white and pink,
Fast as love and beauty can think;
And over it all, my heart, the hue
Of the gentle heaven, fair and blue,
Of the blessed heavens, where the dreams come true.

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